

United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

(202) 224-5364

January 26, 2024

The Honorable Anne Milgram
Administrator
Drug Enforcement Administration
8701 Morrissette Drive
Springfield, VA 22152

Dear Administrator Milgram:

We write to request information on your prevention efforts to protect older Americans from synthetic drugs like fentanyl. The nation's drug crisis is increasingly a synthetics crisis from which older Americans are not immune. Tailored prevention messages, including models like the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) "One Pill Can Kill" campaign, which already provides customized resources for teenagers, parents, and other groups, may help older populations recognize the danger of this pressing public health problem.

During a December 2023 Aging Committee hearing on substance use trends among older Americans, the Committee heard from experts and stakeholders on the rising threat that fentanyl now poses to seniors.¹ Overdose deaths among Americans 65 and older quadrupled over the last two decades, and synthetics like fentanyl are increasingly contributing to these fatalities.² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also reported that the rate of deadly overdoses among older Americans has risen by 53 percent in recent years.³

Prevention for older populations often reflects understandable concerns about prescription medication, overprescription, risky drug interactions, and alcohol misuse, and it is important for public officials and their partners to continue highlighting these risks. The impact of fentanyl on older age groups, including the risks of adulterated medication, often receives less attention in prevention messaging despite the reality that distinct factors make older Americans vulnerable to synthetics. Older Americans susceptible to overdoses tend to be longer-term, stable users whose drugs are infected by synthetics or those turning to illicit markets for prescription drugs.

Among the latter group, older Americans may develop higher tolerance to pain medication they take and search for more powerful drugs. Some seniors also seek prescriptions from illicit markets because policy or medical

¹ U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging Hearing, "Understanding a Growing Crisis: Substance Use Trends Among Older Adults." January 12, 2024. <https://www.aging.senate.gov/hearings/understanding-a-growing-crisis-substance-use-trends-among-older-adults>

² Keith Humphreys and Chelsea L. Shover, "Twenty-Year Trends in Drug Overdose Fatalities Among Older Adults in the US," JAMA Psychiatry. March 29, 2023. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2802945?resultClick=3>

³ Ellen A. Kramarow and Betzaida Tejada-Vera, "Drug Overdose Deaths in Adults Aged 65 and Over: United States, 2000-2020, National Center for Health Statistics, Center for Disease Control and Prevention." November 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db455.pdf>.

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professionals limit their access to necessary pain medication, and some try to find lower costs. Synthetics like fentanyl can be deadly for these older Americans even if they have no history of prior substance use.

DEA now finds that seven out of every ten pills it seizes contain a lethal dose of fentanyl, a startling increase from earlier years, and DEA seized record numbers of fentanyl pills in 2023. Pills laced with synthetics can poison older Americans, and they should be informed of the dangers: that the supply of deadly synthetics is skyrocketing, that these drugs kill quickly even in small amounts, and that they are easily concealed as other commonly used pills.

As DEA continues to develop prevention strategies to help alert Americans to the surging flow of fentanyl, we request that you provide the following information by February 19, 2024:

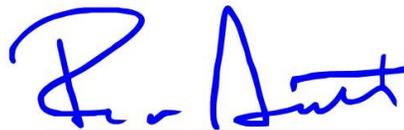
1. What information and data does DEA have on the prevalence of synthetics like fentanyl among older Americans?
 - a. Is DEA engaging with community partners, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, and other partners on the risks of synthetics to older Americans?
 - b. Does DEA have policy suggestions to help improve older Americans' understanding of synthetic risks?
2. Will DEA update the "One Pill Can Kill" campaign to provide information for older Americans with resources similar the campaign's materials for teenagers, parents, and other groups?
 - a. What other resources can DEA provide to help inform older Americans about the dangers of synthetics like fentanyl?

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mike Braun
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Special Committee on Aging



Rick Scott
United States Senator
Special Committee on Aging

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